

NATIONAL PROSPERITY

THE REWARD OF

NATIONAL EQUITY.



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“ Righteousness exalteth a nation : for thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous ; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield. The righteous shall inherit the land.”

Such is the wisdom and benevolence of the Divine economy, that even in this life of probation, an observance of the laws of justice and virtue promotes the prosperity of individuals, and often, in a very remarkable manner, that of whole communities ; whilst a disregard of their sacred obligations is always the precursor of trouble and adversity. Though this consideration has not sufficient force of itself to drive mankind from the evil of their ways, evidences of its truth may serve to strengthen the hands even of those who are governed by higher motives, and perhaps to exert some wholesome influence over men guided only by what they esteem their interest. The American community, in a very especial manner, is deeply interested in this consideration. We are guilty of a gross violation of the laws of equity and sound policy in the institution and maintenance of Slavery—a system injurious to all classes of the community, and affording so obvious an instance of the retributive character of the Divine government, that it is amazing what blindness has happened in part to our intelligent fellow-countrymen to prevent them from seeing it. Argument and persuasion have been, we may almost say, lavished upon them, with alas ! but little effect. The subtlety of man’s wit is ever ready to fortify him in wrong things, and to exercise itself in endeavouring to reconcile sound principles with unsound practices, to rebut argument by sophistry, and appeals to the heart by the cry of cant and fanaticism.

But *facts* cannot be got rid of in this way. They will ultimately have their effect upon every rational mind; and even where the heart may not be changed, they will influence the conduct. A man will not, commonly, with open eyes, and the light before him, rush upon his own ruin.

Happily, upon this important subject, undeniable facts in proof of our position have, of late years, multiplied greatly. It is proposed here to bring some of these together in a condensed form, chiefly taken from a recent publication by Sylvester Hovey, late professor of mathematics in Amherst College, Massachusetts, who spent a considerable portion of 1835-6, and 36-7, in several of the West India islands. The great experiment now in progress there—that of the conversion of no less than 670,000 slaves into freemen, had attracted his attention, and it was for the purpose of witnessing on the spot the results, so far as they might be developed, that he determined upon visiting the scene of action himself. He appears to have been a careful, dispassionate observer; attached, previously to this undertaking, to none of the schemes advocated by the popular associations of the day, for the benefit of the coloured people, but considerably prejudiced against the late measures for emancipation adopted by the British Government. On examination, he changed his opinions in this respect; and we will endeavour to give a short summary of the leading facts which produced this effect upon him, in the hope that their diffusion may have a beneficial influence elsewhere.

If the time should ever come when slavery is to be abolished in this country, and a specific plan of emancipation should be required, the details of systems which have already been tried with success, cannot be examined with too much care. But at present, the public mind has not reached that point. As a community, we are yet to be convinced that any system is practicable. To remove this skepticism, and prepare the way for active measures, it will be useful to show that a plan has been successfully adopted in circumstances similar to our own, and, at the same time, to give such an outline of it, as will explain how it has met and obviated difficulties which have generally been considered insurmountable.

But in the first place, let us take a rapid survey of the state of things in the West Indies before the act of emancipation had been adopted. Property of every kind had greatly depreciated, and, at the time slavery was abolished, had fallen into a most deplorable condition; and as far back as 1792, long before the

question of abolition began to be agitated, Bryan Edwards represents "the great mass of the planters as men of oppressed fortunes, consigned by debt to unremitting drudgery in the colonies, with a hope which eternally mocks their grasp, of happier days and a relief from their embarrassments."

The planters, at several subsequent periods, nearly down to the abolition of slavery in 1834, made the most dismal representations to Parliament of their distresses; and in 1832, earnestly implored the adoption of prompt and effectual measures, to save them from utter ruin. It is asserted, that in Jamaica, at the time of the emancipation, at least two-thirds of the estates were mortgaged, and no small part of the remainder so deeply in debt that it was impossible for the proprietors to redeem them; and such a degree of depression had property reached, that the Court of Chancery was obliged to make a rule, in order to prevent the almost entire sacrifice of estates, that they should not be sold for less than two-thirds of their appraised value. That the causes of this depreciation are chiefly to be found in slavery, will be shown presently. Its baneful influence was sufficient to counteract the greatest natural advantages.

The geological formations of the West Indies, consisting principally of limestone, marl, and volcanic rocks, are among the most productive of the earth. The staple commodities of the climate, also, are of the most rare and valuable kind. Such a soil and climate, with good husbandry, would be an inexhaustible source of wealth. Yet with all these natural advantages, and a teeming population, and high protective duties, (from 7 to 8 millions of dollars annually!) Parliament heard from these colonies, for years, nothing but one incessant cry of bankruptcy, impoverishment, and ruin. It was only by discriminating duties in their favour, that they could compete in the market with the sugar districts of the East Indies, which are cultivated by free labour. What was the cause of all this? It was not heavy taxation; for they paid no taxes except to support their own institutions. It was not their government; for in this respect no colonies were more highly favoured. There is but one answer: it was the wasteful system of slavery—a system which had cut the sinews of industry, paralyzed enterprise, poisoned the streams of wealth, and entailed blight and poverty on the land.

In illustration of this point, let us glance at a few features of this mischievous system.

In the first place, the principle of secondary and subordinate

agency which runs through it, involves great expense, and secures but a very imperfect management of the affairs of an estate.

Next, there is a great want of enterprise and practical skill, both in the resident proprietors and in the agents of absentees. This may result in part from the influence of the climate; but it is more owing to personal inactivity and defective habits of observation. The condition of the proprietors and of the overseers places them above labour; they, therefore, do not acquire the practical knowledge which labour only can give. Nor do they become sufficiently acquainted with the operations which they superintend, either to see defects or suggest improvements. This, and a similar want of tact in the operatives—that is, the slaves—is the reason that so few improvements have been made in agricultural implements and processes. The same thing is manifest in the low state of the arts, the want of schools of learning, and the inertness of the press. Hovey says, “I do not recollect ever to have seen a periodical or book which was published in the West Indies.”

There are defects in the system which affect particularly the management of estates. It is even more faulty in its application to the slaves. It does not supply a motive to effort adapted to their nature. Fear is, indeed, an important principle in our constitution; but its original design was obviously rather to restrain from, than incite to, action. It is in its nature a depressing passion; and when it acquires the ascendancy over the other principles of action, it makes a weak, irresolute, and inefficient man. Now this is the principle which is mainly addressed and called into exercise in slavery. No wonder, therefore, that slaves are proverbially weak and ineffectual. Their moral nature demands a stimulus which their condition does not supply, and which is as necessary for effort as the nourishment administered by food. The system, therefore, considered merely as an expedient for obtaining labour, is fundamentally wrong. It does not more shock our moral sense by its injustice, than it does our understandings by its miserable adaptation to human nature.

This proposition might be illustrated in many particulars. No person can long be familiar with slaves without perceiving its truth. He will see it in the vacancy of their countenances, their down-cast looks, their sullen obstinacy, their slow, and languid, and imbecile motions—in their want of dignity and self-respect, and in their servile and sycophantic airs. A slave

is allowed to perform about half the work of a freeman, and probably his physical strength is as severely tasked as that of a freeman : in other words, with suitable food, and a motive adapted to his nature, he would be physically able to perform twice the work which he is now.

Nor is this all. Labour is not a thing which can be accurately measured, and therefore, exacted with precision. It is impossible to control the motions of a slave. In spite of his master, they will be quick or slow, according to his pleasure. He can retrench his task by performing it superficially or imperfectly, without falling within the strict limits of censure. This is one of the most striking features of slave labour. It is seen in a slovenly agriculture, in the neglect of stock, in the cruel treatment of beasts of burden, in carelessness and inattention to the interests of the master ; in every thing, in short, where there is room for the operation of selfishness and indolence. There are exceptions in individuals who act upon the nobler principles of religious duty or a generous fidelity ; but they are comparatively few.

But the habits of negligence thus formed, are often carried into their own concerns. They are inattentive to health, and to the means of self-preservation, and become the victims of accident and incurable diseases. Parents neglect their children, and likewise their houses and provision grounds, and squander the little stores allowed them by their masters.

There is another important source of loss in the employment of slave labour. It consists in the want of a suitable occupation for those who are in any way disqualified for the regular business of an estate. It is the policy of the system to keep the slaves in ignorance ; so that they are rarely instructed in a variety of arts : their minds are developed neither by theoretical education, nor by the application of their natural powers to a diversity of pursuits. The same short, dull, beaten path is to be trodden from the beginning of life to the end. The consequence is, that they acquire no versatility of talent ; they can do but one thing, and that in but one way. Now mark the effect. Whenever accident, or disease, or age unfits them for their particular calling, they become nearly useless to the estate ; and when it is considered that males and females, old and young, the robust and the infirm, are destined to the same unvarying round of labour, it will not appear surprising, that large numbers fall into this class. It is generally estimated that not more than one-third of a gang are fit for field labour ;

the others are, of course, nearly a dead weight upon the property. In this respect, how immense the advantage of a free community, where some profitable employment may be found, suited to the strength, and capacity, and condition of every individual!

This system leads, almost of necessity, to an unvaried and injurious course of cultivation. There is, in this respect, a striking analogy between the condition of the older islands in the West Indies and the northern slave states in this country. The land is so much exhausted as, in many cases, scarcely to defray the expenses of cultivation. In St. Croix, nothing of consequence is produced but sugar. The soil is continually exhausted by incessant crops of this; and nothing but the constant decomposition of the marl and limestone formations, of which the island is mainly composed, has saved it so long from utter sterility. Barbadoes, where improvements have recently been introduced, appears to form the only exception to these remarks.

But though the planters, as we have already seen, were keenly sensible of the deplorable condition of their affairs, and clamorous for relief, they seem never to have comprehended the cause of all this evil, and to have been most resolutely opposed to its obvious and only remedy—the substitution of free, for slave labour. They apprehended the worst consequences from such an attempt; and the panic excited by the movements of the British Government aided, in no small degree, the more powerful causes above recited, to depress the value of their estates. They looked to emancipation as a very doubtful remedy for the sufferings either of themselves or the slaves: It was an experiment which had never been tried on so large a scale; it involved not only property, but personal security and life; and depended for success on the fidelity and good dispositions of those whom they had been accustomed to regard only with jealousy and distrust.

In such circumstances, it is not surprising that they came reluctantly to an issue in which they had so much at stake; though others might be perfectly confident of a successful result. Happily, however, the crisis is past; the dark cloud has discharged its contents, and has fertilized the ground it was expected to destroy. That portentous day, charged, as they imagined, with violence and bloodshed, has gone by without any of the terrible consequences they so fully anticipated. It

provcd but the dawning of a calmer, brighter era, and the pre-
sage of returning happiness and wealth.

Let us see how this great event was celebrated by the negroes themselves; and let us learn that the effect of acts of justice and benevolence upon the heart of the black man is not to render him brutal and ferocious, but as reason and religion would teach us to anticipate, to excite in his bosom emotions of gratitude and love, and to extinguish whatever sparks of revenge for former injury might have been smouldering there. In Antigua, the mighty transition from slavery to freedom was made in a manner most becoming so serious and important a transaction, and most auspicious to the future well-being of the island. When the shackles of slavery were to be unlocked, and the immense boon of freedom was to be received by one part of the population, and the hearts of the other were trembling with feverish anxiety at the result, nothing could be more fitting than that the attention of all should be directed to that great Being who rules the stormy tempest, and "stills the tumults of the people, and turns all hearts as the rivers of water are turned." Accordingly, on that great day, all the places for worship throughout the island were opened, and were thronged by immense crowds of all ranks and colours.

The day thus commenced terminated in a manner most gratifying to the friends of freedom. The emancipated people, instead of becoming frantic with joy in the possession of their new rights and privileges, and rioting in the ebullitions of ungoverned passion, as might naturally have been expected, retired from the places of public worship to their little tenements, without the commission of a single outrage, or the least disorderly conduct. The day was characterized by stillness and solemnity, rather than by the noise, and tumult, and intoxication which usually, on occasions of rejoicing, disgrace more intelligent and civilized communities.

Even in Jamaica, where the opposition to emancipation had been most resolute, and where the sufferings of the slaves had been extreme, the best feelings prevailed on this dreaded occasion. In all parts of the island, with the exception alone of St. Ann's parish, the transition was effected in the most satisfactory manner. It was a remarkable feature of that momentous day, that almost throughout the island, it was devoted to religious exercises. It was generally remarked, that hardly a drunken man was seen in the streets. In the evening, the people indulged in some amusements, but without disorder. On the

- commencement of the succeeding week, the places of worship were unusually crowded, and the day was occupied in the most quiet and orderly manner. The reports to the Governor, from all quarters, stated, with the exception mentioned, that the apprentices, (as the slaves had now become,) turned out to their work with even more than their usual readiness, and in some places with alacrity, and in all with good humour.

The disturbances at St. Ann's were transient. On several estates, the apprentices refused to work without wages, and manifested symptoms of insubordination. But they were easily reduced to order, and persuaded to resume their labour. With this unimportant exception, it is not known that any refused to work, or any serious difficulty, on the part of the negroes, has followed the great act of emancipation.

The tranquillity of Jamaica is the more remarkable, when we consider the general irritation which has existed among all classes in that island, principally excited by the knowledge the slaves had of the strenuous opposition of their masters to emancipation, and the belief that they were actually withholding privileges already granted by Parliament. It was in consequence of this state of feeling, that early in 1832, a rebellion broke out among them, more serious and extensive than had ever before taken place in the island. Martial law was immediately proclaimed, and the bloody work of execution commenced. According to Madden, 200 negroes were killed in the field, and about 500 more were executed under the sentence of a court martial ; but the exact truth is unknown. The expenses of this rebellion, including the destruction of property, were estimated at more than \$4,000,000. The highly exasperated state of feeling which this event produced between the planters and the slaves, is not easily imagined. It will, however, readily be admitted, that it could not have been a very good preparation for the great experiment in freedom which was about to be tried.

If, under such untoward circumstances, emancipation was safe, there seems little ground to fear it, at any time, or in any country.

It should be recollected, too, that the system of apprenticeship is only a partial emancipation, retaining some of the irritating features of slavery, and chiefly that which denies the labourer the reward of his labour. In Antigua, however, whose example was first cited, the slave was declared free, and entitled to wages as another man. Yet he was not there placed at once

on a footing with his more favoured fellow-citizens ; not that he was *absolutely* debarred from any of the common privileges of freemen, but that certain qualifications were required for their exercise, which he could only acquire by steady industry and good conduct, in the gradual progress of time. This, though vexatious to the ambitious, has produced no serious uneasiness. Nearly all seem readily to have acquiesced in the provisions of the law, and order has been easily maintained by a very simple system of police, many of its officers being themselves black men.

In Barbadoes, where, until a recent act of her Legislature liberated her 80,000 negroes, the apprenticeship system was introduced, the experiment proved equally favourable. The magistrates, indeed, had at first a difficult office between the ignorance and dullness of the poor blacks, and the deep-rooted prejudices and selfishness of the planters. But as the system and mutual rights of the parties became better understood, the business of the courts diminished, and in some parts, they soon had little or nothing to do. On one estate, in the parish of St. Thomas, all difficulties were settled before a tribunal composed of the most intelligent apprentices.

In Antigua, it is believed the people are as free from any apprehensions of riot or insurrection, as is the most peaceable village in New England. The militia, which was frequently on duty during Slavery, and especially on holidays, has not been called out, for the purpose of preserving the public peace, since the day of emancipation—a degree of security little known before.

The diocese of Barbadoes includes near twenty islands ; in all which the new system has far exceeded expectation. With two or three exceptions, no serious difficulties had been realized, and they were of a nature soon to be obviated. Their prospects were those of cheerfulness and bright anticipation.

Those parts of the West Indies which came under the observation of our author, but which are not noticed here, are omitted for brevity's sake. Much additional evidence might be gathered from them.

It is wonderful with what facility, under such existing circumstances, order was preserved among this docile race. But the existence of order was only a negative benefit, and among the least of the blessings which have attended this great revolution. The coloured people have already, in the short period which has elapsed, made astonishing progress in industry, edu-

eration, morality, and some of the simple arts ; and bid fair, ere very long, to grow up into communities conspicuous for virtue, intelligence, and persevering energy.

With regard to industry, it may be stated, that on the estates which have conciliating and judicious managers, there has been no falling off in labour. On the contrary, such estates were never under better cultivation, and in many cases, even with a diminished number of labourers. On some estates, where a different policy has been pursued, there has been a slight diminution. But it is asserted, that no one would hesitate to commence any enterprise from an apprehension that sufficient labour could not be obtained. The working hours are from sunrise to sunset, with two and a-half hours for meals.

Yet their wages are very trifling. In Antigua, only 10 or 11 cents per day for common labourers. The most effectual stimulus, however, to industry, is found to be job-work—a method by which they often more than double their wages. This plan is also for the interest of the planter ; inasmuch as he gets his work done in a shorter time, and with less expense. It is said that the negroes, when they labour in this way, often evince an energy of character, and a power of effort, of which it had been supposed they were utterly incapable.

In Barbadoes, where the rate of wages was higher, say 25 cents for common labourers, and 40 cents for mechanics, many of the planters declared, that they had found much less trouble and vexation in obtaining labour from the negroes, than they did formerly, and would on no account return to the old system. And these, it must be recollected, are the sentiments of men who most strenuously opposed emancipation.

They generally admit, that the apprentices perform as much work now in 45 hours, (the portion allotted to the service of their masters,) as they formerly did during the whole week. Indeed, the cultivation of the island abundantly proves this. The apprentices, usually, are willing and even desirous to work for pay. In this respect, no difference can be perceived between them and white people.

In Jamaica, where the planters have been more severe in the treatment of the apprentices, the system has not worked so well. In consequence of the curtailment in the hours of labour, the aggregate of service has been diminished, but not very materially ; yet it is a fact, that when extra labour is wanted, the apprentices are glad to render it for pay.

As to their industry during their own time, they usually em-

ploy it either in job-work for hire, or in cultivating their ground, or in marketing provisions. As might be expected, many among them are lazy and worthless; but the majority give satisfactory evidence of industry and economy.

The chief troubles of the planters on this island have obviously arisen from their own reluctance to co-operate with the English Government; and of this they are becoming sensible. But in all cases, it requires not a little address to humour the ignorance and caprice of the uncultivated negro, so as to secure his confidence, and a steady and cheerful industry.

This kind of tact is a lesson which slavery has no tendency to teach; and it is not surprising that some of the masters have been found deficient. Indeed, one of the greatest difficulties in emancipation is, the prevailing disposition of the planters to severity and coercion, and their seeming inability to treat a slave as a human being.

One of the most interesting consequences which has immediately followed this great experiment, is the lively spirit of improvement excited in the labouring population. Though a severe drought has greatly curtailed their resources the two past years, yet an advancement is very perceptible in their dress, furniture, style of living, and in the general comforts of life. They are said to be generally endeavouring to get better houses and better food, and in every respect to imitate their superiors. Many supposed that the negro, averse to labour, and contented with the coarsest food, would sink down, as soon as he was allowed to follow his own inclinations, into idleness and beggary. But it is found that he not only wants the comforts and luxuries of life, but that he is willing to work for them; and that he shows no little shrewdness in turning his small resources to account in providing them. The danger is not so much that he will aim too low, as that his desires will outstrip his means. These remarks were made with reference to Antigua, but they are of general application; though the progress is particularly striking on that island, where the planters preferred giving the slave his freedom at once to retaining him under the bonds of apprenticeship. There, too, the improvement in some of the domestic habits of the people has been very perceptible. The degrading system of concubinage, but lately so general, has, it is believed, received its death-blow. Family ties are strengthened—a deeper interest is felt by parents in their children—better provision is made for their support and education, and domestic happiness is more highly

appreciated. Still, it must be acknowledged, things in these respects yet remain in a deplorable condition; but their tendency is in a right direction, the impulse has been given, and a good degree of improvement is manifest.

In Antigua, these effects are not confined to the liberated slaves. In all the islands, there is a large class of coloured females who are considered as having no character to gain or to lose, and who, consequently, became the ready instruments of vice. As soon as the practice of concubinage became disreputable, they were obliged to abandon their former habits, and seek more respectable connexions. Through them, the white population has felt the change; and the sentiments of the whole community have been greatly purified and elevated, at least, compared with what they were, and still are, in many of the islands.

The poor and feeble being no longer entitled, where wages are given, to support from the estates, the blacks, to meet this new demand upon their energies, appropriate a part of their scanty earnings to mutual relief societies; thus manifesting a praise-worthy disposition to sustain their own people free of public charge. In Antigua, many such societies exist. One is cited, as a sample of most of the others, in which the number of contributors had more than doubled in the two years since emancipation, and in which the yearly receipts had increased from \$1,300 to \$2,050 in the same time—this latter amount being derived from 2020 individuals. Immoral persons being denied the privilege of these societies, they offer another inducement to sobriety and good conduct. It is a very remarkable fact, that throughout the islands, there are fewer poor people among the negroes, who depend on charity, than among the whites, by three to one, and this, notwithstanding the ratio of population would more than warrant the reverse of that proportion, to place the two classes on an equality.

It is the general sentiment that crime has decreased, and that the offences committed are, for the most part, of a trivial nature.

At the close of the first quarter of 1837, in Antigua, out of a coloured population of upwards of 35,000, but 82 individuals were in prison, and not one of these sentenced to more than three months' confinement.

Even in Jamaica, where such has been the state of public opinion, that it was difficult for the negroes to find an advocate before their courts, crime has not increased. There are more

formal trials ; but testimony and facts show a diminution of crime. With a population of 30,000, counting all classes, there were, towards the close of the first half year of 1837, in the house of correction for the parish of Kingston, 98 inmates, of whom 50 were apprentices, while at the corresponding period of 1834, there were 73 slaves in the same prison. Of these apprentices, full eleven-twelfths were in for terms of only five to thirty days—a proof of the trifling nature of their offences.

Education has received a great impulse. In Antigua, schools, it is said, are so distributed as to be accessible to every family ; and there is not a child on the island who may not now enjoy their advantages. In point of fact, though no compulsion is used, most of those who are of a suitable age attend ; and what, perhaps, affords still more encouragement is, that the adults themselves frequently manifest a strong desire for knowledge, and are often seen in the highway and fields with a book in their hands.

In Barbadoes, a great change has been wrought. In 1825, but one public school existed on the island. Ten years ago, the idea of a school for the instruction of slaves was treated with the utmost derision. It shows the progress since made, that in a single parish, about 2000 Testaments were distributed, in 1835, to as many persons, who were heard to read before the books were given to them, and all of whom had been slaves the previous year.

In Jamaica, the schools of the missionaries are crowded.

There is still, however, a lamentable deficiency in the means of education throughout the islands. It is thought quite two-thirds of the apprentices are without proper instruction.

Among the unexpected advantages of emancipation, we must not omit to notice one which would be quite inexplicable to a person unacquainted with the habits of slaves—a great apparent improvement in health.

But one who has known the various shifts and pretences to which men will resort in order to avoid the pains of unrequited labour, will easily comprehend why the sick houses of the planters, formerly so thronged with patients, should now have so slender an attendance.

It says much in favour of the orderly and peaceable character of the negroes, that notwithstanding their intellectual ignorance, they have, through all the exciting events of latter

times, so quietly borne the deprivations and sufferings to which they have been, and still are, continually subjected. and it is a circumstance calculated greatly to lessen the apprehensions any may honestly feel at the liberation of a large body of ignorant men in political communities.

This tranquillity may in part be ascribed to the influence of hope upon the cheerful temperament of the negro; but another and higher power has been equally, or in all probability, much more effectual:—that is, religious instruction. In Antigua, it is said to have been unquestionably so. The Speaker of the Legislature of that island testifies that this has been the great instrument for preparing the way of freedom; and Secretary Stanley asserts, that in his opinion, no rural district, in any part of the dominions of the King of England, has a greater number of religious instructors and places for divine worship; and our author thinks their advantages, in this respect, equal to what is generally found in the northern parts of the United States. Let it be borne in mind, that Antigua affords the most prosperous example of complete emancipation on a large scale, and that there religious instruction has been most encouraged. This is a strong argument, and ought to have great weight with us.

It is generally thought, in the West Indies, that the minds of the negroes are peculiarly susceptible to religious impressions. However that may be, it is certain they have a high regard for their spiritual teachers; and many of them would rather incur the censure of their master than that of their minister. Hovey remarks of St. John's, particularly, that the first day of the week is ostensibly observed there better than in any other town of equal population with which he is acquainted; and this in a country where, until quite recently, the markets were held upon that day.

Speaking of one of their places of public worship at which he attended, he describes the attire and appearance of the assembly to be such as truly became the occasion. For simplicity and neatness of dress, and propriety of manners, he had rarely seen a more unexceptionable congregation; and it was composed almost entirely of emancipated slaves, few of whom could either read or write.

In Barbadoes, the number of places of worship has latterly increased one-half, and that of the preachers is nearly doubled.

In Jamaica, the fears and jealousies of the planters are sub-

siding, and the impediments heretofore opposed to religious instruction diminishing ; and among the apprentices, the disposition to improve their opportunities has much increased.

The three islands of Jamaica, Barbadoes, and Antigua are so much referred to in this sketch of the West Indies, because they are generally admitted to afford a fair sample of the whole.

Since emancipation, in many of the religious congregations in the different islands, no distinction merely on account of colour prevails, and the same may be said of schools and other assemblages.

But perhaps the pecuniary benefits which this great act of justice has been the means of conferring upon the planters themselves, may have more weight with some minds than moral or religious considerations. Let us, then, look at the result in this respect. Take Antigua, first, in which we have a striking illustration of the successful operation of the new system, in the advanced price of real estate, and in the increasing enterprise and prosperity of the island. Some have said that the estates alone are worth as much now as both the estates and the slaves were ten years ago. This is true if we estimate their value by their returns, and the annual expense of cultivation ; and this may eventually be the price which they will command : but at present they are not sold for so much. Before emancipation, it was almost impossible to sell real estate at any rate ; but it is now easily disposed of at an advanced price of fifteen or twenty per cent. Some poor estates, which had been abandoned under the old system, because the incomes did not meet the expenses, have been again brought into cultivation under the new. Commerce and enterprise have also greatly revived—permanent investments are more common—public improvements are projected, and an impulse is given to business of every kind. More buildings had been erected on the island since emancipation, than for twenty years before, and the importation of British goods had augmented probably one-fourth.

To these sure indications of increasing confidence in the stability of things, may be added the cheerful animation which pervades all classes of society. The joy and quickened sensibility of a people who have escaped some great calamity, or achieved some mighty conquest, are everywhere visible.

Jamaica, under the influence of apprenticeship, does not present quite so pleasant a picture ; but even there, property has

greatly advanced. When our author was there, several estates had recently been sold at an advance of more than forty per cent. on their value ten years before; and this no rare occurrence. Real estate was in great demand, and the rent of houses in Kingston had considerably risen.

The extraordinary advance in the price of real estate is no doubt principally owing to the fact, that the value of the slaves becomes attached to the land. This is a natural consequence of emancipation; for if the estates cultivated by free labour, will yield as large profits as they did under the old system, they are worth as much to the owner as both the estates and slaves were before slavery was abolished.

As a further evidence of increasing prosperity, may be mentioned the establishment of two banks in the island, and the construction of a rail-road from Angels to Kingston; and also a project to run a line of steam-boats around the island. These are the first improvements of the kind which have been attempted in the West Indies.

In these two islands, according to the common opinion, we have the two extremes—the best and the worst example of the new system. We see that in each, the moneyed interest of the planter, so far from being injured, has been greatly benefited. No question the same pleasant result would, to some extent, follow, in whatever land the baneful influence of slavery should be destroyed.

Why these two islands do not exhibit equally happy consequences, has been partially explained, and further examination will perhaps make more evident. In the former, for many years, the way has been preparing for the change. The slaves have been treated with increasing lenity and kindness—their feelings and comfort more regarded—and their wants better supplied. Long before emancipation, solitary confinement had been substituted, to a very great extent, for corporeal punishment, and the masters preferred the verdict of the magistrate to that of their own arbitrary will, even in cases where the law vested them with authority to act. This relaxation produced a corresponding change in the slave; so that instead of fear and jealousy, mutual confidence and good will grew up; and when the bands of slavery were destroyed, there were other and better ties to hold them together. Much also had been done for the diffusion of moral and religious principles, and literary instruction. It was the uniform testimony of people in Antigua, that religion had been the most efficient preparation for freedom

—that it had taught the slaves a respect for the laws both of God and man ; and had thrown over them restraints, which are of vital importance in their present condition. And religion found in education a powerful auxiliary ; they laboured hand in hand for many years, to prepare the slaves for the immense blessing which they have since received.

A petty traffic in which they were indulged by their masters, had also a good effect in teaching them the value of money, and habits of economy and management. They soon became very shrewd bargain-makers.

In the last place, freedom was a voluntary boon granted by the master ; it was more than Parliament required of him. The slave was sensible of this, and it excited in his bosom sentiments of confidence and gratitude.

In Jamaica, candour obliges us to grant that the physical formation of the island had some influence in marring the complete success of the experiment. Owing to its mountainous character, and the difficulty of intercourse, the residents on many estates are quite secluded. An undue proportion of solitude is found to be unfavourable to the development of some of the best traits of character, in the negro, as well as in the white man. Isolated communities are prone to degenerate into barbarism. On those islands where the slaves were so circumstanced as to be often in the towns, a marked effect was evidently produced upon them by the sight of the manners and habits of more cultivated people ; by coming in contact with civilization, they caught something of it themselves. Certain it is, that from this and other causes, the negroes of Jamaica are, in point of intelligence and morals, much behind those of other islands. One source of much evil is the habit prevalent here, of entrusting the care of estates to overseers and sub-agents, a class of persons always notorious for their severity. But beside this, there was the open hostility of the planters to every proposal for ameliorating the condition of the slaves. The determination for many years was, to defend slavery at all hazards, and, even when defeat was certain, to yield the ground as slowly as possible. They were obliged to comply with the will of Parliament at last, and did so with a tolerably good grace ; but it is not to be supposed, with such feelings, they would or could heartily co-operate with the mother country in trying a new system, introduced, as they declared, “against their better judgment, and to avert the still greater danger of opposing it.”

In considering, therefore, the apprenticeship system in Ja-

maica, these painful circumstances must be kept constantly in view ; otherwise, the system itself may be charged with difficulties, which, in reality, are due to the almost insurmountable obstacles which it had to encounter. There is one provision of this law which enables the planter to exercise a species of tyranny exceedingly injurious to the apprentice. Forty-five hours in every week are to be given to the service of the former, and he may so distribute these hours as to render the fragments of time left for the slave nearly useless. This irritating policy has in some cases been pursued in Jamaica. Yet it ought to be mentioned that on this island there are planters who have pursued a high-minded policy towards the blacks, and who have reaped the reward, not only of their gratitude and good behaviour, but, as before stated, of the increased value and prosperity of their plantations. No argument, then, can be founded on the experience of Jamaica, against emancipation ; but the reverse.

The planters of Barbadoes acted more humanely, and consequently more wisely. Though at first zealously opposed to emancipation, they soon yielded to the evidence of facts, and, greatly to their own advantage, as has been already shown, entered into sincere co-operation with the promoters of it.

The intellectual inferiority of the negroes is a common topic of remark, and is admitted by many intelligent persons. Some would indeed deny them the rank of men. But the experience of all ages shows how easy it is to vilify a people whom we wish to keep in subjection.

Our European brethren once gravely asserted, " animals, as well as men, degenerate in America ;" that " even dogs ceased to bark, after having breathed awhile in our atmosphere." Current maxims, adopted in such circumstances, are greatly to be suspected ; for, being countenanced by a general prejudice, it is no one's interest to contradict them. And such may be the opinion in regard to the unfortunate portion of our species, of which we now speak. For centuries they have been the victims of a grinding oppression ; and thousands have fed their lusts and avarice on their degradation and wrongs. That under such circumstances, their natural inferiority should be asserted, is a matter of course ; and that those who have no interest to examine the subject, or think to the contrary, should believe the assertion, equally accords with our experience.

We need not identify the cause of emancipation with the absolute equality of the negro and white races. It is undeniable,

that the negroes are capable of performing the duties and enjoying the privileges of a civilized and Christian people. To deny them such benefits, therefore, is to deprive them of their birth-right.

But much is to be seen at this day, in the West Indies, to induce a belief that there is no such inferiority in the negro race. That they have a temperament peculiar to themselves, is unquestionable. Their cheerful and easy disposition and good natured humour are proverbial. Their natural kindness and attachment to offspring and friends, when not counteracted by adverse influences, are equally well known. But these peculiarities by no means imply low intellectual or moral qualities. How striking the differences between the English, the Scotch, and the Irish ; and yet who will undertake to say, which has the advantage in point of natural endowments ? And how does it appear that the easy good humour of the negro is more inconsistent with a superior intellect, than the volatility of the French ? That there is a natural connection between the temperament and the mental constitution, is not denied ; but that any general temperament is invariably associated with imbecility of understanding, and especially that it points out a whole race as under an intellectual blight, is a proposition which admits of no proof.

The evidence latterly elicited in the West Indies, in favour of the natural equality of the negroes, does not consist in any remarkable coruscations of genius ; but in their rising to the level of character and attainment, when obstacles were removed, which we should expect other people, in similar circumstances, to attain ; and in occasional exhibitions of native strength and force of mind, altogether superior to that of their fellows. These remarks may be illustrated, both by the newly emancipated and the former free coloured and black population.

The great body of the slaves were deeply degraded ; and some indeed seemed to possess but little in common with their species, except the form. These are, generally speaking, the remnants of the stock imported from Africa. They were taken, as is well known, from a state of the deepest barbarism, and were placed in a situation which almost forbade the possibility of intellectual and moral expansion. Their descendants are quite a different order of beings ; exhibiting a readiness of perception and of adaptation, which is rarely seen in their progenitors. We refer now to the common field negroes. In the

next rank above these, are the domestic servants. They enjoy freer intercourse with white people, and observe enough of their habits and sentiments, to acquire the ideas and modes of thinking which are peculiar to civilized society. There is also another class, consisting of tradesmen and mechanics, who often possess, in a high degree, the confidence of their employers, and acquire no small influence in conducting the affairs of estates. Many of these two classes exhibit a strength of moral principle, and a native force and manliness of character, which not only give them an advantage over their fellows, but indicate their affinity with the best types of our species.

If from these, we turn to the free coloured and black population, we shall find still stronger evidence of a natural equality. It consists in an advancement in knowledge and mental development, corresponding with their advancement in privileges. As a class, it is true, they are not yet so respectable as the whites; but they can number many highly esteemed and valuable citizens. It speaks much in their favour, that, in nearly every colony, they were admitted, before the act of emancipation, to all the civil rights of the highest classes. They are found in the stations of mechanics, merchants, and magistrates —also as members of the assemblies, and in all the professions. They are able to carry on a profitable trade, in the various departments of industry, and successfully to compete, either in price or skill, with white people who are engaged in the same business. According to the testimony of Archdeacon Eliot, of Barbadoes, they have, by superior industry, driven the lower order of whites from almost every trade requiring skill and continued exertion. They are prosperous, while a large white population are in poverty and wretchedness. There are comparatively few who solicit charity, and while the competent among them contribute their full quota to the support of the poor whites, they take exclusive charge of their own colour.

From the details which have been given, we are now prepared to state some important principles. Whenever great truths are fairly settled, either by demonstration or by experiment, they should be so recorded; as they then become legitimate principles of reasoning in subsequent investigations of the same subject. The three following may now be placed in this rank.

1. Emancipation, instead of promoting a spirit of insurrection, is the surest means of eradicating it. The experiment in

the West Indies, proves the contrary opinion to be a mistake. From the introduction of slavery down to the time of emancipation, every island was subject to insurrection. Dr. Madden enumerates not less than twenty-two open rebellions—six conspiracies to assassinate the white inhabitants, detected on the eve of execution—and one mutiny which took place in Jamaica, during this period. But since emancipation, apprehension has so far vanished, that many of the troops are already disbanded ; and it is supposed they will shortly be reduced to a small force composed of negroes only. Neither has a haughty spirit of independence, nor an uncourteous demeanour, taken the place of sullen obedience and cringing servility. Though the relation of the coloured man to the white, is changed, he still feels dependent, and is disposed to forget what was unpleasant in the past, and to conciliate, by his deportment, future favours.

2. The second general principle, confirmed by this experiment, is, that there is no difficulty in obtaining labour from liberated slaves, for wages. This is established beyond controversy.

3. The third principle is, that free labour is as cheap as slave labour. This principle has long been considered as settled in theory ; it is now so by experiment. The evidence would justify a statement of the proposition in stronger terms. But if in the beginning, and under many disadvantages, free labour is as cheap as slave labour, what may be expected in a more advanced state of the system ?

But after all, the most triumphant proof of the truth of the foregoing statements is contained in the fact, that on the very day on which this remark is penned, no less than eight of the Legislatures of the British West India Islands have, voluntarily, and under the powerful conviction that their pecuniary and political advantage lies in it, declared the apprenticeship system at an end, and the negro henceforward as free as the white man. The islands which have distinguished themselves by this act of wisdom are Jamaica, Barbadoes, St. Vincent, Dominica, and four smaller islands, containing in all, a mixed population, it is believed, of not less than 580,000, of which the proportion of coloured to white appears to be not less than 19 to 1.

Four hundred and eighty thousand men are thus, on this memorable day, the 1st of 8th month, 1838, admitted to the enjoyment of their just rights ; and a nation has entered upon a

new career, full of the most reasonable hopes and the brightest anticipations.

Numerous and familiar to us are the examples which have occurred in all ages, of terrible judgments visited upon nations for iniquity ; but it has been reserved for these latter days to behold so great an instance of the divine goodness in richly rewarding a national act of righteousness. For although the benefits which have accrued to this people may, by the philosopher, be referred to the operation of certain fixed principles, or moral laws, as legible as those which govern the material world—it is not a whit the less true that it is God who bestows the recompense of reward ; for He is the executer, mediately or immediately, of all his laws. A law is but a mode, and has no vital energy of its own.

We are living witnesses of an incontestable proof displayed on a larger scale than mankind has, probably, ever before known—that as wretchedness is the sure result of wickedness, so is happiness, of virtue ;—and this demonstrates the righteousness of God. It tells us that however much He may love the happiness of his creatures, He loves their virtue more.

May our beloved country, through the influence of that wisdom which cometh from above, become early prepared to partake of the benefits of this holy law !

“ Bring ye all the tithes into the store house”—“ and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”

THE END.